



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

# **Ongoing Violations of International Law and Defiance of OSCE Principles and Commitments by the Russian Federation in Ukraine**

As prepared for delivery by Chargé d’Affaires, a.i. Harry R. Kamian  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
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The United States welcomes the December 27 exchange of more than 300 detainees between Ukraine and Russia-led forces in eastern Ukraine. The action fell short of a true “all-for-all” exchange, but we view it as an encouraging step towards implementing the Minsk agreements – and it is a step that could bring momentum and progress toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The recent ceasefire in eastern Ukraine has unfortunately proceeded in a manner similar to past efforts. Exchanges of fire ebbed temporarily, but we now see violence resurging to pre-holiday levels. As we entered the depths of winter, there was little relief in hotspots such as the Svitlodarsk-Horlivka-Debaltseve triangle and the Avdiyivka-Yasynuvata area, nor an end to Russian shelling of vital civilian infrastructure.

On January 5, for example, a damaged gas line in so-called "DPR"-controlled territory caught fire, leaving more than 50,000 civilians without power as temperatures plunged below freezing. Regrettably, the Donetsk Filtration Station, which provides clean water to over 345,000 people, continues to suffer damage from shelling and other attacks. On January 3, a bullet went through a window of the primary chlorination buildings, just meters away from storage tanks containing over seven tons of chlorine gas. On December 23, the station was shelled three times, forcing staff to halt operations and shelter in place. And on December 22 alone, there were nearly one thousand ceasefire violations near the station.

Mr. Chair, the United States calls upon the Russian Federation to reverse its unilateral action and return its representatives to the Joint Center for Control and Coordination (JCCC). The JCCC has successfully brokered temporary “windows of silence” ceasefires, and safety zones around critical infrastructure. Utility companies have stated that without this important bilateral mechanism, they have limited faith in the arranged windows of silence. This makes their repair work more difficult and the effects of damage to such facilities more consequential. Russian withdrawal from this mechanism, in our view, is a symptom of a broader unwillingness to implement its commitments, including establishing a ceasefire, under the Minsk agreements.

Mr. Chair, regrettably, civilians continue to bear the brunt of this conflict as casualties mount. On December 23, the SMM confirmed that a 50-year-old man died as a result of injuries sustained from shelling at his home in Yasynuvata. On December 22, the SMM reported that a 37-year-old man had died due to shrapnel wounds near Zolote. And

on December 21, the SMM reported the death of a 67-year-old man who accidentally mishandled an explosive device.

Mr. Chair, the United States reiterates its call on the Russian Federation as the instigator of this conflict to command the forces that it arms, trains, leads, and fights alongside to implement a full ceasefire, withdraw its weapons from the line of contact as proscribed by the Minsk agreements, and disengage its forces. Doing so will eliminate the hardship and danger this conflict casts upon civilians who are caught in its crossfire.

As many of our colleagues have mentioned previously, Mr. Chair, the threats and harassment and violence by Russia-led forces directed at SMM monitors continue. At a Russia-led forces checkpoint on January 5, an SMM patrol was stopped by a man wearing a Russian Federation Armed Forces uniform. On January 3, in so called “DPR”-controlled Makiivka, two apparently intoxicated militants approached an SMM patrol, made hostile remarks and, according to an SMM report, kicked the front of an SMM vehicle parked nearby.

Access restrictions are continuously used as a tool to prevent the SMM from fully carrying out its mandate. According to the SMM’s January 10 weekly report, in addition to the restrictions on the freedom of movement of SMM personnel, due to the observed or potential presence of mines and unexploded ordnance, freedom of movement was restricted 26 times during the holiday period in areas controlled by Russia-led forces. According to SMM reporting, this compared with a single restriction during the same period in areas controlled by Ukraine. The United States calls upon the Russian Federation and its proxies to stop their interference with SMM patrols and monitoring capabilities. We urge the sides to cease impediments to SMM UAV flights. And we call for the full, free, and safe access for the SMM throughout Ukraine, according to its mandate.

Mr. Chair, the United States notes the December 27 release from Russian prison of activist Rafis Kashapov after serving a three-year sentence for public criticism of Russia’s seizure of the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine. This individual was the first person in Russia imprisoned for posting articles critical of Moscow’s abuses in Crimea. We also note with concern the January 16 conviction by occupation authorities of Ukrainian activist Volodymyr Balukh on baseless weapons possession charges in retaliation for his public displays of Ukrainian patriotic symbols. The court sentenced him on the same charges an appeals court rejected just two months ago.

In closing, Mr. Chair, let me reiterate that the United States fully supports Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally-recognized borders. We do not, nor will we ever, recognize Russia’s occupation and purported annexation of Crimea. Crimea-related sanctions on Russia will remain in place until Russia returns full control of the peninsula to Ukraine. And we join our European and other partners in restating that our sanctions against Russia for its aggression in eastern Ukraine will remain until Russia fully implements its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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